

Opportunity Amidst Crisis: Keeping Hope Alive

In these troubled and challenging times, people throughout Wisconsin are trying to deal with intense uncertainty, fear, anger, anxiety, and sadness. Terrorism intends, as its primary goal, to fill people with overwhelming fear. Thus, a central component of the public health response to terrorism and the current war is to foster ways for people to turn their fear into opportunities for growth.

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health has developed a series of messages to serve as a guide to people's efforts to develop a sense of security and safety, to reach out to others in deeper ways, to listen more intently, and to respect each other's views with greater sensitivity.

These messages are built on the following assumptions drawn from a body of national and international research:

1. **Resiliency:** Resiliency is the capacity to stay healthy and well in the face of adversity. Studies of concentration camp survivors, of people with severe handicaps, and of children in violent environments demonstrate the potential for human beings to bounce back from severe hardship. Resiliency can be learned. All people have the capacity to become resilient. Also, resiliency is not reserved just for individuals. It is a process that begins with the individual and incorporates the influences of family, community, and the whole society. Children are especially resilient, but they're also vulnerable. Adults have a responsibility to bring out resiliency in children. To do so, they have to become resilient themselves. That's why the first set of messages below is specific to adults.
2. **Listening to Children:** Families, teachers, and caregivers need to carefully listen to children and pay attention to what they are feeling. They need to know that the adults in their lives love and honor them, and will do everything in their power to keep them safe. The stakes are high. If adults are not genuine with children during this time of ongoing uncertainty and fear, many of them will become alienated, disconnected, isolated, anxious, and depressed.
3. **Community:** Now more than ever, we share a responsibility to come together as authentic communities. Social support, service, and civic engagement are of vital importance in promoting the health of all people. When people feel that they matter, they are more likely to be healthy – physically, mentally, and emotionally. In particular, Americans are challenged to model a high level of treating each other with dignity and respect rather than with stereotyped judgment. For example, most people say "hello" and "how are you" to others every day. The challenge now is to take the time to listen to the responses.

4. **Information and Trust:** People, when faced with fear, want information that is clear and accurate. False reassurance from government officials undermines public trust at a time when such trust is essential. To turn fear around, candor rooted in facts should form the foundation for communication.
5. **Media:** All citizens should be careful about overexposing themselves to the media. Public health leaders should strongly advise adults to limit the viewing of television and model that for children.
6. **Taking Care of Oneself:** People can't reach out to others unless they are healthy themselves. Eating well, exercising, getting plenty of sleep, laughing (when appropriate) and engaging in activities that bring joy and inspiration are more important than ever. In particular, for both children and adults, art in all its rich expression can bring great solace.

Messages

For Adults

1. **Connections:** Draw on and deepen your social connections. Take more time to spend with family, neighbors, co-workers, and friends. Become involved in your community.
2. **Meaning:** Find meaning in events, as horrible as they may be. For example, when thinking about the September 11 attacks and its aftermath, try not to dwell on the horror of the deed, but rather focus on the humanity, altruism, and generosity that have come as a response to it.
3. **Avoid Denial:** Don't shut out the reality of what has happened and what is currently unfolding both in our nation and abroad, but put it in perspective. Find ways to share your feelings with others, but in ways that elicits meaning rather than fear.
4. **Respect:** What better time than this to make sure to take the time to treat others with dignity and respect. The way we engage in relationships directly bears on our health. Positive relationships with others will help us all stay as healthy as possible.
5. **Media:** Try to avoid stimuli that exaggerate and reinforce fear. Limit access to media and other venues that may expose you to repeated unnecessary sights and sounds that may serve only to provoke fear.

For Parents, Teachers, and Caregivers

1. **Listen:** Take time to listen to your children about what they have seen and heard. Listen carefully to their fears and ask questions that encourage critical thinking. Be honest and genuine about your feelings and give factual answers to questions when possible. Help them to try to see the good things that have come out of tragedy and find meaning in the events that are happening.
2. **Feelings and Action:** Encourage children to express their feelings through a variety of ways- art, music, drama, dance, letter writing, journals, volunteering.
3. **Time:** Spend time with your children, and encourage them to spend time with trusted adults and friends. Create a supportive environment: Let children know that you care about them. Reassure them of their safety and let them know they are loved. Become more involved with their schools. Maintain schedules and routines as much as possible. This gives children a sense of security.
4. **Television:** Limit the time your child spends watching TV. Often children may not realize they are seeing the same event over and over, but may think it is happening again. Monitor your children's access to the news and talk about what they see.
5. **Become Engaged:** Promote self-esteem, efficacy and empowerment. Help children find ways they feel they can be involved- support their decisions to be involved in memorials, rituals, activities, services or donations of time or money as they desire to be involved.

For Children and Youth

1. **Talk:** Talk to your parents or another trusted adult about your feelings. You may be confused about how you feel at times, and this is normal. Don't be afraid to express your feelings. Try not to focus on fear, but on all the good things that have come about- like people working together and giving to others.
2. **Kindness:** Be respectful of others. Take time to treat people (your friends, family, teachers, and other adults) with respect and dignity. Spend time with family and friends.

3. **TV:** Try to take a break from the TV. It's normal to be curious and want to know what is going on, but take time out and try to think of all the good things happening in the world around you.
4. **Appreciate What You Have:** Try to keep things in perspective. Yes, things may be scary and you may be worried, but remember that while there are some scary things out there, there is much, much more good out there and the chances of anything happening to you or your family are small. Know that your family, teachers, and many other people are doing everything they can to protect you and keep you safe.
5. **Creativity:** Express yourself by being creative and imaginative - draw a picture, play music, take photos, write in your journal, or another way you can think of. Volunteer for a fundraiser, write a letter, attend events and services that may be planned in your neighborhood, hug a friend. Urge your family to do the same.

Selected Websites

The amount of information on the Internet dealing with these issues is overwhelming. The Wisconsin Division of Public Health recommends the following sites:

- www.cdc.gov

Check the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for updated information about bioterrorism.

- <http://www.aap.org/>

The website of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) contains a timely updated compilation of AAP resources and materials on disasters, bioterrorism, and psychosocial support of children.

- <http://www.nmha.org/>

The National Mental Health Association website has information, resources, and suggestions for people of all ages.

- <http://www.survivorguidelines.org/>

A volunteer panel of experts to provide helpful guidelines and resources on how to emotionally cope with and heal from the terrorist attack on September 11 and its aftermath created this website. It offers compassionate assistance to the

survivors from the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, their families and friends, the families and friends of those who were killed, rescue workers, and everyone feeling the emotional impact of the terrorist acts. It contains information about resiliency.

<http://www.familyties.org/>

This is the website for Wisconsin Family Ties, an organization that has a toll-free number as a referral source regarding serious mental health issues pertaining to children. The line is for parents seeking referral information. The number is 1 800 422 7145.

Toll-Free Number for Resource and Referral Information

www.mhamilw.org

This is the website for Mental Health Associations in Wisconsin. The site offers mental health resources for children, parents, the workplace, physicians and other health care providers, the faith community, and teachers. In addition, **people from throughout the state can call the Milwaukee MHA for personal assistance and referral if they have mental health concerns. The number is 1-414-276-3122. The following toll-free number is available for information and resources: 1-800-642-4630 (800-MHA-INFO).**